

Report to the Missouri Training and Employment Council on DWD's Continuous Improvement Reviews during PY 2000

Background

The Field Services section of the Division of Workforce Development began a Continuous Improvement Review (CIR) process on March 5, 2001. The purpose of the reviews was to look at certain targeted local WIA system elements and to identify improvement opportunities for local areas. Also, a major objective was to identify best practices that are occurring and to publicize them for technical assistance purposes.

This process was developed in response to federal regulatory requirements that indicate, "The State monitoring system must...Ensure that established policies to achieve program **QUALITY AND OUTCOMES** (emphasis added) meet the objectives of the Act and these regulations, including the provision of services by One-Stop Centers, eligible providers of training services, and eligible providers of youth activities."

The Field Services Section essentially reinvented itself in order to meet these goals and to provide a final work product consistent with the needs of customers. To do this, the section embraced the basic principles of Total Quality Management (TQM). This model allows us to evaluate customer satisfaction in relation to the products and services we provide. This report is our work product and should be used as a guide in both state and local system enhancements.

Process

The process used was provided to MTEC by mail during February 2001. The Monitoring Overview contained in that mailing is attached (attachment 1a) for general reference purposes. In summary, our system (which is also subject to a continuous improvement process) looked at 12 basic WIA program elements. These elements include: the use of "triage" in assessing customer needs and expectations, the guidelines used to "register" customers into WIA and the associated use of the Toolbox (MIS system) by local staff, local definitions of self-sufficiency and the use of those definitions in providing case management services to customers, the use of Individual Employability Plans (IEPs) in documenting case management and customer service strategies, the ability of local systems to treat customers in a "holistic" manner by addressing comprehensive needs, familiarity with the WIA performance standard system and its affect on program interventions for customers, customer opinion on the services they receive, the adequacy of local memorandums of understanding (MOUs) in establishing a cohesive operational structure for customers, staff feedback on the services they provide and opportunities they see for

improvement, local technical assistance and training needs, and the identification of best practices. In addition, participant files were reviewed to test the validity of registrations, customer service strategies, and limited testing of eligibility. We did not review the service delivery process of any partners other than DWD and the WIA Title I service providers.

An entrance conference was held on the first working day of each week and an exit conference on the fourth working day. The entrance conference generally involved discussion about local systems and how they operate. The exit conference generally involved the development of a self-identified continuous improvement plan and their plans to present that information to local decision-makers.

A member of the Field Services' Continuous Improvement Team will be assigned to work with each area. A report will be sent to local areas that will outline the results of their Continuous Improvement Review and invite them to contact their assigned team member to assist in the region's development of a proposed Continuous Improvement Plan. This phase of the continuous improvement review process will be completed when the WIB adopts the plan. The assigned team member will work with the local area to implement the plan.

BEST PRACTICES

During our Continuous Improvement Reviews we asked each region to give us a list of their best practices, something they feel is done better by them than any of the other regions or it may be something unique the other regions are not doing. We received several best practices throughout the State and for this report we picked one per region that we felt was their best. The following is a brief explanation of how the selected best practice works in its region:

Because West Central has a large population of Spanish speaking customers they have translated their local common intake/screening tool into Spanish.

St. Charles publishes a customer newsletter called " Monthly Mentions." The March 2001 issue contains information about employment opportunities, services offered at the Career Center, and a calendar of local events. The newsletter is mailed to both present and past program participants. A similar newsletter is in place for employers.

The Jefferson/Franklin Consortium's Individual Employment Plan includes a page that prompts customers to consider their own self-sufficiency issues.

A Southwest Region partners group is reviewing partner performance measures. A better understanding of each partner's performance measures will enhance customer service and staff cooperation.

Northwest has an Adult Education and Literacy classroom located in the St Joseph Missouri Career Center. In the last year this classroom had 300 students registered for various services provided in the classroom. The services include, literacy training, upgrading of basic skills, GED preparation, and computer skill tutorials. Not only do they serve the youth and adult populations, but they have expanded to include the older worker population.

The Northeast Region Career Center partners utilize the Basic Employment Skills Training (BEST) curriculum to train customers for workplace readiness. In 1997 the Northeast Region formed a committee of all partners to address the needs of the local employers. The committee identified workforce readiness competencies and through funding provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, enlisted the expertise of the Instructional Materials Laboratory of the University of Missouri-Columbia to develop a curriculum. The region certifies each employee that will be an instructor. Instructors include employees from partner agencies and customers from all partner agencies are invited to attend.

Southeast has a radio-dispatched transportation service. It services Cape Girardeau, Dunklin, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Scott and Stoddard Counties. This service is provided to assist customers with transportation to and from work. They provide service to over 600 employees in 20 communities.

The South Central WIB chair and other private sector members actively participated in the development of the initial continuous improvement plan. During this process they role played as a customer of the plan.

St. Louis City's outreach efforts include marketing through radio spots and newspapers to reach local non-English speaking populations.

The St Louis County, North Oaks Career Center has a computer lab with typing, word processing and spreadsheet tutorials. Any customer visiting the Career Center has access to the lab and may work at their own pace to increase their skills in the above areas. There is a full-time instructor on-site to assist the customers. The lab will allow customers to obtain the basic skills needed to compete in the local labor market.

The Ozark Region recently expanded the co-location of partners in Springfield to include the entire Division of Workforce Development office. In order to accommodate the added employees, additional space in the existing facility was procured and extensive reconstruction of the floor plans were made. The result

of the renovations is a Career Center that is conducive to the customers needs and a likely prototype for other regions to consider.

The Kansas City and Vicinity Region is using a triage approach that begins with the customer completing a self-assessment of their strength and weaknesses.

The East Jackson County Career Center is open from 8:00 to 5:00 on Saturday. All services are available to customers that might not be able to get to the Center during the week, such as job seekers and employers who normally work Monday through Friday.

The Central Region Columbia Career Center has developed an "Intranet" to which all partners have access. The intranet was designed to allow partners the opportunity to mutually maintain customer casenotes, have an internal email system, as well as other shared features. Computer stations have been placed in partner offices to provide staff easy access.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING NEEDS

During our Continuous Improvement Reviews we asked about local technical assistance and training needs. Responses are listed below and it should be noted that the Continuous Improvement Team fully supports the needs identified.

WIA training (basic)

Toolbox training

Performance measures training

Serving older workforce training

Information sharing among partners and staff

Front desk staff training

Toolbox manual

Team building/empowerment

Achieve full partner buy-in

State partnering

Cultural change training

Open communication

Dealing with "knowledge is power" attitudes

Customer job retention training

In-school youth difficulties

Individual employability plan writing assistance

Employer as a customer

Customer education/experience assessment

Documenting customer progressions through core to intensive to training

Understanding the relationship of state and local priorities
America's Career Kit
Accessibility for individuals with disabilities
Serving diverse populations
Integration of services and reporting processes
Local fundraising and grant writing

We will assign one of our Continuous Improvement/Quality Assurance Team members to each region to assist them with these needs.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT REVIEW PROCESS PARTNERS

284 people attended our entrance and exit conferences representing the following organizations:

County Commissioners
Local Workforce Investment Board members
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Division of Family Services (both state and local)
Vocational Rehabilitation (both state and local)
Division of Workforce Development (both state and local)
Division of Employment Security
Child Support Enforcement and Parent's Fair Share
WIA Title I Service Providers
Community Action Agencies
Regional Planning Commission's
Adult Education and Literacy Providers
Vocational Technical Schools
Community Colleges
Housing Authorities
Green Thumb and other programs for the Aging
Rural Missouri Incorporated
American Indian Council

CUSTOMER INTERVIEW RESULTS

We interviewed 255 randomly selected customers. Because first time visitors lacked the background to answer our questions, they did not receive a full interview and their comments are not included in these results. Questions asked were related to facilities and equipment, overall services, what they liked best about the services, and what suggestions they had to help us serve them more effectively. Our interview process was not based on scientific principles, but we feel the responses are representative of the general population.

One question asked was how they rated the Career Center's facilities and equipment. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest rating, the customers' average rating of the facilities and equipment is 8.5. This indicates that customer opinions of the facilities and equipment are very good, but there is room for improvement.

Another question was also based on the same 1 to 10 scale and asked how customers rated the overall services they received through the Career Center. The average rate for responses to this question is 8.8. The customer opinion of our services is very good, but there is room for improvement.

We asked what the customer liked best about the services they received or what services they found to be most effective. The top three answers were the equipment, friendly and helpful staff and easy access to the "Missouri WORKS!" System. These responses reinforce the facilities and equipment rating above and they indicate that partner staff is customer oriented.

The fourth question asked for suggestions that would help us to be more effective in our service delivery. Most customers did not have a response to this question. More one-on-one help was suggested and several stated that childcare would help them. Most of the customers we interviewed felt we were doing our best to assist them in their needs. Childcare was a concern for several of our customers.

Special Thank You – the Continuous Improvement Team extends a special "Thank You" to employees of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. These individuals helped us directly interview customers: Ron Jewell, DeeDee Pippin-Hake, and Dale Wimer.

STAFF INTERVIEW RESULTS

We interviewed 576 Career Center and satellite staff. One question we asked regarded how staff rated the initial assessment and referral process. Another solicited suggestions about improving the initial assessment and the referral process.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest rating, staff rated the initial assessment and referral process among one-stop partners at 7.3.

Responses to our question about improving the initial assessment and the referral process included a need for cross training/information sharing, the

development of a universal application process/common intake form, and improving the reception process.

The staff felt that they were not knowledgeable enough about partner services to make appropriate referrals. They also felt that it is not customer friendly for partners to have different assessment forms and applications. Staff said that the reception process needed to be improved. Some One-Stop reception areas worked well while other reception staff weren't knowledgeable enough to refer customers to the right staff for their particular needs.

CONCLUSIONS - OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The partners attending the CIR entrance and exit conferences agreed upon the following general opportunities for improvement. We support these conclusions and recommendations. This information should be reviewed not only by MTEC but also by the local Workforce Investment Boards for development of continuous improvement plans.

- Conference attendees in all of the regions we reviewed agreed that the ability of local systems to treat customers in a "holistic" manner by addressing comprehensive needs could be improved by providing Toolbox access to all partner agencies. This internet-based customer information management system can facilitate the sharing of common information and, currently through case notes, information about customer assessments and employment plans. Attendees agreed that increased use of the Toolbox would reduce duplication of effort among partner agencies in the collection and management of information about shared customers.
- There is a need to improve staff awareness of all partner services available in order to make quality referrals and ensure that customers receive appropriate services. This knowledge, along with improved communication among both state and local partners, will help ensure that customers are served in a holistic manner.
- We found inconsistencies in the local guidelines used to determine the point at which a person is registered in WIA. The law only requires registration when a customer receives a staff assisted core service that involves "significant" staff time. Because registration is the beginning of performance standard tracking and guidelines defining "significant staff time" are not clear inequities are created between regions and within regions.
- The goal of WIA is for the customer to become "self-sufficient". Generally, we found that partner agencies have different definitions for "self-

sufficiency." The WIA service providers' definitions are almost universally less than meaningful, often recanting the federal regulations that state that at minimum local definitions cannot be lower than the federal poverty level. Improving the WIA service provider definitions and coordinating them with partner's definitions will help ensure that services are provided until customers are ready to leave the program and will also enhance integration of services.

- The use of a "triage" process to assess customer need is another area that was identified as being an opportunity for improvement. In many regions we found little or no assessment of customer needs during their initial contact (and often-subsequent contacts) with the One-Stop system. Initial contact is the most important and customer needs are more likely met if the person who first meets the customer is trained in the wide range of programs available and how those programs meet human needs. Insufficient resources/staff are generally available to make high quality initial assessments. In many regions the receptionist merely hands the customer a locally developed intake form to fill out and indicate the service they wish to access. Even if the customer is not aware of all of the services available or their need for them, they are often sent to the resource area to look for job openings.
- In many areas, if the customer is not registered with the State's labor exchange system; they are handed a "bubble sheet" application form to complete that will be scanned into the labor exchange (MO Works) computer system. Customers told us this application is difficult to complete. The average time for completion is 45 minutes to an hour with some customers needing an hour and a half to complete it. In addition to an improved triage process, this bubble sheet process needs to be reevaluated with a focus on the customer's needs and expectations.
- In most areas we found that partners knew very little about each other's performance standards, especially the WIA performance standards. A better understanding of all partners' performance standards would result in a more integrated and seamless service delivery system that would better meet the customer's and partner's needs.
- Most areas agreed that the memorandums of understanding (MOU) between partners that were developed last year can be improved to go beyond cost sharing and include an outline of the ways programs and services will be integrated to best serve customer needs and reduce duplication of services. The MOU's should show the flow of customers through the one-stop system and outline specific services each agency will provide.

- We found that virtually all areas are using some sort of Individual Employability Plan (IEP) to document case management and customer service strategies. Several areas agreed that the plans could be improved to give a more detailed description of the steps needed to lead the customer to self-sufficiency. Some areas are taking steps to share IEP's from partner agencies in order to decrease duplication of effort. Sharing these plans saves staff time that can be spent assisting more customers. There were very few instances of customer education on what a career center is and does.
- WIA is not a mandated "work first" program but it is often implemented that way.
- In many instances the career centers are still called the "unemployment" office by our customers. This must be dispelled.
- Signage remains somewhat varied and inconsistent, although, this is being corrected in the near future.
- Each One-Stop has designated a one-stop operator. In many regions the One-Stop operator is a consortium of at least three One-Stop Partners. There appears to be a lack of meaningful direction from the designated One-Stop operators, and a lack of unification of systems with umbrella system controls. In order to maintain a universal customer focus there needs to be clearly defined roles and stronger roles for the One-Stop operators, which does not promote funding silos.